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THE GLOBAL CASE STUDIES TEXTBOOK PROJECT: FACULTY-STUDENT RESEARCH COLLABORATION IN THE BUSINESS FRENCH CLASSROOM

ABSTRACT

Despite the need for a new generation of entrepreneurs, higher education continues to train new cadres of employees while neglecting entrepreneurship as a viable career path. In this article, the senior author (a Business French instructor and an entrepreneur) and the junior author (an International Business undergraduate) describe an entrepreneurial class project that culminated in a published book of multimedia Business French (BF) case studies. The Business French class, French 423—divided into five research teams—researched, designed, and created five case studies each in English and French. The cases, published using Articulate Storyline, included a one-page case statement, YouTube videos depicting the firm or industry, comprehension activities, and a problem to solve. The cases focused on firms representing France, Canada, and Francophone Africa. San Diego State University's national Language Acquisition Resource Center (LARC) and Montezuma Press will publish the case studies book with students receiving co-authorship in 2014.

KEYWORDS: Business French, case studies, international business, Francophone Africa, Quebec

INTRODUCTION

In a 2012 *Global Business Languages* article, Sacco and Hammett described an entrepreneurial approach to the teaching of Business French, which took place in 2012. In the 2013 course, a publication component was added to the entrepreneurship theme. Specifically, the Business French class designed and created an e-textbook of international business case studies. Five research teams each created five case studies featuring Francophone firms in Europe, North America, and Africa. The e-cases, prepared for publication using Articulate Storyline (<http://www.articulate.com>, an interactive website), included (1) a one-page problem statement, (2) YouTube videos depicting the

firm or industry in question, (3) comprehension activities, and (4) a problem or dilemma to resolve. San Diego State University's Language Acquisition Resource Center (LARC) is publishing the French-language version while Montezuma Press will publish a hard copy of the English-language case studies book. The French 423 students will be credited as co-authors for both versions.

Case studies are becoming increasingly popular in Business Language (BL) classes. BL case study books entered the market in 1994 with the publication of Boyd's *Making Business Decisions: Real Cases from Real Companies*, designed for Business English students. In 1996, Federico and Moore introduced *Cas pratiques pour le français des affaires* for Business French students. In 2000, Loughrin-Sacco and Gagnon published *Québec Inc.: Un manuel de français des affaires*, the first textbook of case studies focusing on Quebec and Canada. Case studies focusing on Brazil appeared in 2006 in Kelm and Risner's *Brazilians Working with Americans: Cultural Case Studies*. Recently, Kelm, Doggett, and Tang (2011) published an exciting book of case studies focusing on China: *When We Are the Foreigners: What Chinese Think about Working with Americans*.

Each of these six works presents case studies in its own unique fashion, reflecting the needs of its audience. Conversely, each book still preserves the core principles of the Harvard Business School's case study method. BL faculty seeking to better understand the use of case studies should refer to the seminal work by Gonglewski and Helm, "An Examination of Business Case Methodology: Pedagogical Synergies from Two Disciplines," published in 2010 in *Global Business Languages*. In 1999, Forman and Rymer also provided a description on teaching with business case studies.

THE CLASS PROJECT

In the 2013 spring semester, the Business French instructor had a class largely consisting of graduating seniors exhibiting a serious case of senioritis. Many students were returning from an intense semester at business schools in France. A final semester at SDSU was definitely a letdown for many of them. To motivate them, the instructor challenged the class to co-author an e-textbook of intercultural case studies; the class readily accepted.

The class of 22 Business French students was divided into five research teams. Their task: to design and create five case studies each, for a class total of 25 case studies. In preparation for the project, the students underwent intensive training, analyzing case studies from Federico and Moore (1996) as

well as Loughrin-Sacco and Gagnon (2000). This training helped the students understand the rationale, structure, and composition of case studies. The most difficult task was familiarizing them with intercultural dilemmas in which there is no one correct answer or a single route to resolution.

In the research phase, each team researched and selected Francophone firms from the three continents. They studied each firm thoroughly, looking for best practices and blunders. Their study included the examination of firm websites, YouTube videos, TV ads, and press coverage in business-oriented media. The choice of firms was narrowed down during class discussions. Each team and the instructor then agreed upon the five firms to serve as case studies.

In the creation phase, each research team submitted multiple drafts of one-page case statements in both English and French. Once the case statements were finalized, the research teams searched for YouTube videos to accompany the case statements. Each case study included one or two YouTube videos to amplify the firm's best practice or blunder as well as provide listening comprehension practice for future end users. Once finalized after class discussion, the research teams attached reading comprehension activities and exercises to each YouTube video. Finally, the research teams designed the problem or dilemma to be solved. The instructor placed the case studies on Articulate Storyline and sought input from each research team on post-production issues.

The class included students from eight countries: the US, Canada (Quebec), Mexico, Peru, France, Congo, South Africa, and Turkey. The students also represented six different majors: International Business (10), Mechanical Engineering (3), Exercise Science (2), French (3), Spanish (3), and Television and Film (1). The two Canadian students, visiting from Concordia University in Montreal, served as the content experts for Quebec; the Congolese and South African students spearheaded the development of the Africa-oriented case studies; while the three French natives assisted classmates in developing case studies on France.¹

"I really enjoyed the class because it was so unconventional. I loved that we weren't taught from a textbook and everything was hands-on. It allowed us to become independent learners, much like in France."

—John C.

¹ All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the students.

RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT

A four-pronged rationale exists for the project.

1. Providing an entrepreneurial activity to our Business French students
2. Enhancing collaborative skills among the student research teams
3. Promoting faculty-student research
4. Meeting the growing need for case studies in our profession

First, as an entrepreneurial activity, the class project provided students with experience in developing intercultural materials for commercial use. In the past, multinational firms have hired numerous French 423 students because of their global skills. In the future, as the firms' global experts, they may be asked to design and create case studies as a tool of instruction for less global-ready employees. At a more mature stage of their careers, some may start their own consulting firms to assist US firms seeking to enhance exports in foreign markets or foreign firms seeking to export more effectively in the US.

Second, in global business, no one works alone. Experience with working in global teams is becoming a real expectation for many multinational firms. In canvassing global employers, researchers Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum (2011) investigated what those employers sought in an employee. The answer from all firms queried was almost identical: companies desperately seek "critical thinkers, tacklers of nonroutine complex tasks and collaborators who thrive on working in global teams" (pp. 376–78).

Third, San Diego State University has traditionally promoted faculty-student research. SDSU's Strategic Plan encourages "undergraduate student scholarship through innovative courses, experiences, and engagement" (p. 3). Every year, SDSU hosts a research forum for faculty and students to present their joint projects. For SDSU students pursuing an academic career, these initial research efforts represent their first publication. For many of our students in French 423, the publication represents a unique practicum to insert in their resume.

Fourth, despite the popularity of case studies, many Business French instructors are reluctant to teach a class based solely on case studies. Furthermore, many BF instructors are reluctant to require a second textbook (like a BF case study book) in their class. Consequently, the idea emerged to create and place case studies electronically on San Diego State University's Language Acquisition Resource Center website. In the near future, instructors can peruse Business French case studies and select them for use in their classes.

“I think these type of projects should be more common, because these cases are real-life cases. In addition to what we read and learn in textbooks, we should analyze companies in real life. I think that would prepare us for the real business life more than the textbooks.”

—Maria A.

CASE STUDY THEMES

The case studies textbook included several themes. First, the class featured three Francophone world areas: France, Quebec, and Francophone Africa. Second, in addition to business-oriented case studies, the class chose case studies that focused on multicultural issues such as the sale of Halal beef in France, the prohibited use of the hijab in French public schools, French women in the workplace, and child entrepreneurs in Africa. Third, they added case studies focusing on geo-political issues, such as China’s influence in Africa and the foreign investment in Mali. Fourth, they included cases in a special category called “Mission Impossible,” which involves the marketing of certain “unmarketable” US products in France such as Snuggies and Dunkin’ Donuts.

“My group wrote a majority of our case studies on Francophone Africa, and before this class, I didn’t know much about Africa.”

—Suzanne R.

SAMPLE CASE STUDIES

Les enfants entrepreneurs

Francophone Africa’s unit of economic activity is the legion of child entrepreneurs selling everything on the streets from gum to phone cards. Many of these child entrepreneurs start as early as age six, working eight hours or more and often foregoing formal schooling in order to provide needed revenue for their families. In this case study, a child entrepreneur was interviewed in Congo to better understand his daily routine. The child entrepreneur was asked practical business questions about stock replenishment, sales strategies, profit margin, and daily earnings. At the end of the interview, the child entrepreneur discussed his dreams and future aspirations.

La charte de la langue française

Most non-Québecers do not understand the complex language laws that are designed to protect the French language in *La Belle Province*, especially in

business and economic contexts. This case study explains these complexities using both text and videos. The case authors also insert a video, which end users will enjoy, that is a comedic spoof of Quebec's language laws based on Bill 101 and Bill 86.

La viande Halal

France, with its ever-growing Muslim population, is divided as to the benefits of Halal beef. Halal, the Islamic equivalent of kosher beef, slaughters animals in a more humane fashion than traditional French beef providers. The case study examines the controversy of Halal beef, Islamic religious practices in France, and future implications for French society.

“I really think this class helped me with my cultural skills because we researched a lot of cultural issues such as the Halal meat controversy in France. It also helped me with my Francophone cultural skills. This was the first time in a French class that we talked about Canada or Francophone Africa, which was great.”

—Paul J.

Dunkin' Donuts

Dunkin' Donuts is one of our “Mission Impossible” case studies. “Mission Impossible” is an activity we have borrowed from Will Thompson, who used it in his graduate-level MBA classes. The goal of “Mission Impossible” is to challenge students to design a marketing plan for a US product that may be extremely difficult to promote in France. Dunkin' Donuts has been a huge success in the US and elsewhere, but can Dunkin' Donuts succeed in France, the land of croissants and brioches? The case study orients BF students for the task of determining the feasibility of expanding operations of this fast-food giant in France.

Failure in France

The Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has successfully promoted its faith in more than 100 countries around the world and boasts an incredible track record in conversions in virtually every country—except France. A primarily Roman Catholic country, France has been a particularly tough nut to crack, as only 15% of French men and women regularly attend Mass. Despite the lack of religiosity, an evangelical faith has made major inroads after only a decade of missionary work. Students are challenged to uncover this intercultural mystery.

PUTTING STUDENTS IN THE ROLE OF DECISION MAKER

The final step in creating the case studies was to develop situations to be addressed by future students. It is important to note that these situations could be based on problems, dilemmas, challenges, opportunities, and similar situations, as no two companies or situations are identical. Each “problem” to be designed needed individual care in order to fully address the case firm or issue.

When creating a situation to be analyzed, the case writer looks at various components to create a scenario in order for the case reader to learn from that situation, theory, or concept and to make a decision. According to Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, and Leenders (2001), each component, or dimension, has three levels of difficulty that involve or develop different skills. In the textbook project, the class acted as the case writers and created scenarios for future case readers. In this particular instance, the student case writers focused on scenarios that were level two in the analytical dimension, level one in the conceptual dimension, and level one in the presentation dimension (except when it came to format—the use of videos and extra activities suggests a higher level in regards to the presentation dimension).

The model used for creating the situations where future students have the opportunity to take on the role of the decision maker follows the three-part formula found in *Learning with Cases* (Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, & Leenders, 2001). In their book, the authors describe a way for students to better learn from the case method of teaching by first utilizing individual preparation, followed by small-group discussion, and ending with large-group discussion. This formula allows students to develop the numerous skills that case studies can offer. As case writers, the French 423 students took into consideration how the end users would be learning and designed the situations to follow the three-part formula.

STEP 1: INDIVIDUAL PREPARATION

In the first step, the case reader reads the case (and supplementary materials, if any) before moving on to an analysis; this is where the case reader becomes the decision maker. In creating a problem to be solved, the French 423 students thought about how to best present a role-playing scenario for future case readers. The most important part of this step for the case writers was to focus on creating a situation with an analytical dimension difficulty of level two; in other words, the case writers created situations without explicitly stating the final decision. Not expressly giving the case readers the final decision allows them to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills and create solutions on their own. Also, not every situation has one “right”

answer, and allowing case readers to come up with their own solutions reflects real-world situations. It is important to note that in the individual preparation step, the case reader finds a solution to the scenario before moving on to small-group discussion.

STEP 2: SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

Step 2 (and Step 3) represent the minority of the case readers' analysis, as the bulk of the work should be successfully completed in individual preparation. When creating questions for the second step, the case writers focused on extending the first step. For example, if a small group consists of four members and each has come up with their own individual preparation, the second step focuses on refining the multiple ideas into one, possibly two, strong final decisions. This step is where each student has the opportunity to speak and defend his or her decision, learning from others and developing their communication skills. Small-group discussion is critical because not every student will have the chance to speak in large-group discussion.

STEP 3: LARGE-GROUP DISCUSSION

Finally, the case readers reach Step 3, the classroom discussion with their instructor and the rest of their peers. By now the case readers should have made a strong decision and be able to defend it to the rest of the class. For this step, the case writers worked on creating questions to simulate real-life situations, whether oppositions to the proposed final decision or requests from the case readers to defend their decision against future scenarios. For the case readers, this step represents presenting their idea to a board of directors or management team, which may come with opposition or a demand for further explanation.

EXAMPLE OF A CREATED SCENARIO

The following represents an example of a situation to be addressed using the three-part formula explained above. For this case, the case writers created two scenarios (a cultural dilemma and an answer to environmental issues) that could be used together or separately.

Firm: Hydro-Québec

Taking the Role of the Decision Maker

Hydro-Québec has been trying to move forward with the construction of a hydro-power dam and has hired you and your team as experts not only on cultural conflicts, but also on sustainability. They are in need of a plan to

answer the demands of the Cree Tribe over the use of land the Cree have lived on for years and the rising concerns about the environmental impacts of hydroelectricity.

Individual Preparation

1. Describe the current relationship between Hydro-Québec and the First Nations peoples. What compromises could be reached to suit both parties?

OR

2. What arguments could be made against hydro-powered facilities (in terms of the environmental impacts), and how would you suggest Hydro-Québec answer the criticisms?

Small-Group Discussion

1. Come up with a proposal to the Inuit population that would address their concerns over land usage.

OR

2. Come up with a proposal that addresses the environmental sustainability concerns made by Hydro-Québec's opposition.

Large-Group Discussion

1. What long-term solutions could be made to better remedy the tense relationship between Hydro-Québec and the Inuit population?

OR

2. How can Hydro-Québec confront future opposition as environmental activism has increased over the years?

CONCLUSION

The recent phenomenon of faculty-student research collaboration emanates in large part from the master-apprentice model of education and training found in the Middle Ages and beyond. In the fifteenth century, Michelangelo learned to paint from Ghirlandaio through various tasks ranging from sweeping floors to mixing paints to assisting the master in completing frescoes to creating his own artistic masterpieces such as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In the SDSU Business French class in 2013, one of the goals of the class project was to train students first-hand to conduct research leading up to the design and construction of case studies. These case studies led to the eventual publication of an e-textbook.

It is widely accepted that teaching with case studies requires the teacher to serve as “tutor, guide, coach or facilitator” (Flynn & Klein, 2001, p. 71). In the class project, the French 423 students were asked to assume the teacher’s role in the design and creation of the 25 case studies. They selected firms, themes, topics, activities, and dilemmas to share with future users based on their background and experience as students. The French 423 students chose real-world problems that their instructor never would have thought to select, thus impacting his creation of case studies for the future. The students also added YouTube videos to each case study because they knew future users would appreciate interviews, discussions, and TV ads as they proceeded through the case study. Lastly, the French 423 students created dilemmas to guide future users to analyze situations and recommend realistic solutions.

In French 423, students praised the practical nature of case writing, the application of international business principles in a global environment, and the freedom to create. They also noted the intensity of intercultural conflict and the depth of Francophone cultures.

“I really loved the freedom that we had to choose the topics and what we wanted to write about. It just really allowed groups to be creative and come up with a whole scenario by themselves.”

“Gathering research material for each assignment of the project made me, as an International Business student, more aware of the needs and cultural demands of the different countries related to our case studies.”

“This class helped me have a broader but deeper sense of the French culture, and the Francophone societies in all its dimensions.”

“I now try to think about cultural differences, as well as how I will be dealing with certain clients, or situations, a lot more than I used to.”

“It allowed for the augmentation of communication and cultural awareness that is required to be successful in the global professional environment.”

“Overall, I think that this class was really beneficial especially for IB majors; having a knowledge about business in France and Francophone countries is crucial for people who study IB French and Western Europe.”

French 423 students never anticipated that a university course could lead to a professional opportunity such as co-authorship of a book.

“I think it’s cool. To be done with a class and have a book to show the work you did during the semester. Most classes you finish the class with monotonous projects that end up in the trash, whereas our book will be sold on Amazon and it’s something you can add to your résumé.”

“It is amazing, I honestly never thought I would be a co-author in my life. I went into the class with absolutely no knowledge of business or case studies so it was great to have co-written 6 case studies in English and French during the semester. It was an unforgettable experience, definitely one of the highlights of my time at SDSU.”

“The co-authorship/co-editorship is actually very exciting. It makes me feel like we’re involved and actually doing something *productive* other than just taking exams and getting graded.”

Innumerable researchers (e.g., Miller & Kantrov, 1998; Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991; Kowalski, 1991) have praised the use of case studies as pedagogical tools for developing students’ critical thinking skills, but few researchers have studied the benefits of students’ case study construction. In 2005, Gil-Garcia, Villegas, and Cintron studied the impact of students creating case studies as a tool for learning. They found that creating case studies was “a productive exercise in their educational experience” (p. 394). Students praised the dynamic opportunity to become teachers through case study creation. They also admitted the difficulty of designing and creating real-life cases, which included “defining the problem, developing the narrative and looking for solutions” (p. 395).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE STUDENT RESEARCH TEAMS

1	2	3
Dakota Senne	Altina Jones	Mario Delgadillo
Romy Jedwab	Pierre-Yvan Bergman	David Cornejo
Kevin Shelton	Jeremy Poincenot	Mariana Diestra
	Guilain Bwinika	Mert Orhun
4	5	
Patricia Diaz Soto	Jordan Lenoir	
Jessica Gonzales	Maricruz Carillo	
Jose Alfredo Sanchez-Curiel	Laura De Soto	
Lauren Swann	Gerardo Castro	
	Felipe Correa	
	Lizbeth Casas	

APPENDIX 2: STUDENT REACTIONS

After completion of French 423, the junior author contacted students in order to gain feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the course and textbook component. Fifteen of twenty-one students volunteered their opinions for the following questions:

1. What was your overall opinion of French 423?
2. What did you like or dislike about the textbook project?
3. What did you like or dislike about the process of writing the textbook?
4. Do you feel that you took anything away from this class/project? If so, what?
5. How do you feel about having co-authorship/co-editorship with your classmates and professor?
6. What do you think about projects like this becoming more common in universities?
7. How did this class/project help you with your French skills (language and/or cultural)?
8. Any additional comments or criticisms?

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